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Meaning Of The Polish Stamp

It is perhaps understandable, but not justified, that some citizens have taken exception, on anti-Communist grounds, to the Polish commemorative stamp issued by the United States Post-office Department.

Why, we have been asked in a telephone call and in an unsigned letter, should the United States "commemorate" Poland when that country, under Communist domination, is trading with the sworn enemies of American freedom and, along with other Iron Curtain countries, supplying arms and munitions to the Viet Cong?

It is well that someone raised the question, for it deserves an answer.

The point of it is that the stamp pays tribute to a people, not a government, and to the Poland that was and, we have reason to hope, will be, rather than to the Poland ruled by men who take orders from Moscow.

The stamp is one of a series commemorating some of the ethnic groups, particularly the minority ones, who stand out in the American saga. They have been fully assimilated into the population of the United States. They are as patriotic Americans, more so in many instances, as those whose ancestors were among the earliest settlers.

The Poles are an extraordinary people and those who have migrated to the United States have made an extraordinary contribution to the country, mentally, physically and culturally.

Because of its turbulent history, because the Poles have many times lost their freedom to tyrants through military conquest and because it is a colorful nation, Polish-Americans still retain a strong feeling for their homeland. They are proud of their background, and are no less fervent American citizens for it.

The Poland commemorated by the stamp is not the Communist-dominated land, although nowhere else in Central Europe is the grip of Moscow more tenuous, even loose, than in Poland. The Poles are allowed more freedom than say, the East Germans or Czechs, because too tight a yoke would produce instant rebellion. The Poles can even criticize their government, so long as they don't

put it in writing.

Rather, the stamp commemorates the Poland which alternately has fought the Germans and the Russians for its freedom for a thousand years, since the time of the Teutons and the Cossacks. It is the Poland commemorated in the World War II "Warsaw Concerto" which rallied the captive Poles and sent the free Poles into battle under their own and other flags against the Nazis.

Displaced Poles fought with the Royal Air Force of Britain and in the ground forces and the underground. Polish-Americans, of whom we knew a few, fought with almost frightening ferocity. And they would have fought the Russians after the Nazi defeat, if they had been given a chance.

The stamp commemorates the Poland of Chopin and Padarewski, the latter the great musician-statesman who was one of the giants of the first half of the 20th Century.

More than this, it is the Poland of Casimir Pulaski who was one of the real heroes of the American Revolution. Count Pulaski and his father were Polish patriots and the son commanded the patriot army before he was driven into exile to America in 1772. When the colonies rebelled, he was in the forefront of the army of George Washington.

Pulaski distinguished himself in the early fighting and soon became a general. He organized the Pulaski Legion and fought in major battles in South Carolina. He successfully defended Charleston and died in the Battle of Savannah.

On a peninsula in the Savannah River there still stands, in good repair, the remains of Fort Pulaski which was laid out and partly built by a United States Army lieutenant of engineers named Robert E. Lee.

The Poles have given much to the New World and they make up one of the largest ethnic groups in both the United States and Canada. At one time there were more Poles in Chicago than in Warsaw, the capital of modern Poland. We can no more deny them their heritage than we could the Anglo-Saxons.

Would that we had more like them.

JAN SUZIN

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